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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, covering the period from January to July 2007, contains information on the activities undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish and strengthen national human rights institutions; the measures taken by Governments and national human rights institutions in this regard; the support provided to regional activities of national human rights institutions; and the cooperation between national human rights institutions and international mechanisms to promote and protect human rights. Information regarding the work of national human rights institutions in respect of specific thematic issues is also included. Documents relating to the events referred to in the present report may also be found on the National Human Rights Institutions Forum website (www.nhri.net).

The present report complements the report of the Secretary-General to the Human Rights Council of 8 February 2007 (A/HRC/4/91), which covers activities for the period from January to December 2006, and should be read in conjunction with it.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 23 of General Assembly resolution 60/154 in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixty-second session on the implementation of that resolution. The present report covers activities for the period from January to July 2007. It complements and should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General to the Human Rights Council of 8 February 2007 (A/HRC/4/91), which covers activities for the period from January to December 2006.

II. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and national human rights institutions

2. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) accords priority to the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions with due regard to the Principles relating to the status of national institutions (the Paris Principles; General Assembly resolution 48/134, annex). OHCHR also works for the improvement of United Nations system-wide coordination in regard to the work of national human rights institutions, and supports their increased participation in the United Nations human rights system. OHCHR also encourages the sharing of best practices among national institutions, supports the strengthening of their regional networks and facilitates their access to United Nations country teams and other partners within and outside the United Nations system. During the reporting period, OHCHR sought, through a wide range of activities, to heighten its commitment to supporting the building of strong human rights institutions at the country level and increasing the effectiveness of their regional coordinating bodies.

3. National human rights institutions are seen not only as institutions to which assistance may be provided, but also as partners that are central to national human rights protection systems and thus to the OHCHR country engagement strategy. Indeed, they are increasingly recognized by the international community as mechanisms that are essential to ensuring respect for the effective implementation of international human rights standards at the national level.

4. This crucial role was highlighted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the opening of the nineteenth session of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The High Commissioner stated that national human rights institutions were instrumental in ensuring respect for the rule of law at the national level as well as to addressing critical human rights issues, such as summary executions, torture and arbitrary detention, as well as fighting impunity.

5. On 3 May 2007, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Danish Institute for Human Rights, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the role that national human rights institutions were likely to play within the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council. She pointed out that the review might lead to the birth of many new national institutions and greater compliance of national institutions with the Paris Principles, as countries redoubled efforts to improve their human rights record. As the Human Rights Council reviewed the human rights situation of a particular country, the role and

contribution of its national human rights institutions would become essential, in ever closer cooperation with non-governmental human rights organizations. The Deputy High Commissioner stressed that not only could national human rights institutions submit reports on the national human rights situation, but more importantly they could ensure follow-up to recommendations coming out of the universal periodic review process.

A. Advisory services

6. During the reporting period, tailored advice was provided by OHCHR to a number of countries that had requested advice on an appropriate constitutional or legislative framework for new national human rights institutions and on their nature, functions, powers and responsibilities. Comparative analyses, technical cooperation needs assessments project formulation and evaluation missions were also undertaken. Burundi, Cambodia, Chile, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Jordan, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Uruguay and Zimbabwe benefited from such services. Advice was frequently provided in collaboration with other United Nations partners, including the United Nations Development Programme and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as well as with regional networks of national human rights institutions.

B. Support for international initiatives

1. International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and its Accreditation Subcommittee

7. In its capacity as the secretariat of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and its Accreditation Subcommittee, OHCHR provided substantive support to, and facilitated the holding of, the nineteenth session of the Committee in Geneva, from 21 to 23 March 2007. Discussions were held on the engagement of national institutions with the Human Rights Council; the role of national institutions in the United Nations treaty body process; follow-up to the eighth International Conference of National Human Rights Institutions and the Declaration of Santa Cruz; the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and plans for the ninth International Conference of National Human Rights Institutions. The Committee also elected a new Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson (the Chairpersons of the national institutions of Canada and the Republic of Korea, respectively). OHCHR also provided support to parallel events on the role of national human rights institutions in torture prevention; on their interaction with parliamentary human rights committees; on their work in informing Member States; and on their cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

8. Regarding the role of national human rights institutions in the treaty body process, the focus of discussion was the outcome document of the round table, held in Berlin on 23 and 24 November 2006, and organized by the German Institute for Human Rights, with funding from OHCHR, the German Institute for Human Rights and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. The outcome document included a draft harmonized approach to engagement of national human rights institutions in treaty

body processes. The Committee participants acknowledged the importance of a harmonized approach and agreed that participation was crucial and should be a standard practice in treaty body sessions. For example, national institutions could: (a) contribute to the preparation of or add additional elements to reports that States are required to submit periodically; (b) play an important role during the examination of the periodic report by the treaty body; and (c) ensure timely follow-up to treaty body concluding observations at the country level. National institutions could also encourage ratification of international instruments or accession to those instruments, removal of reservations, and ensure their broadest possible implementation.

9. At the meeting, a presentation was made on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was highlighted that, according to the Convention, national human rights institutions had an explicit role to play. For example, article 33, paragraph 2, refers to the role of national institutions in the promotion, monitoring and protection of the rights guaranteed by the Convention. Participants also expressed their support for the disability rights database, developed initially in the Asian and Pacific region to gather and analyse information on how national institutions handled complaints involving persons with disabilities. The Committee chairperson called upon national institutions to take joint initiatives to implement the Convention and use article 32 as a platform for that purpose.

10. Another important outcome of the meeting was the unanimous support of Committee members for the proposal to establish permanent representation of the Committee in Geneva, primarily to allow the Committee and individual national human rights institutions to make their voices heard at sessions of the Human Rights Council and at treaty body meetings. The Committee members also encouraged regional coordinating bodies of national institutions to actively participate in Council sessions, as was the case with A-status national institutions and the Committee, in compliance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/74, subject however to the strict procedures agreed upon at the session (for example, they could speak only on behalf of institutions with A-status accreditation).

11. At its meeting held during the session of the Committee, the Accreditation Subcommittee recommended A-status re-accreditation for the national human rights institutions of Bolivia, Indonesia, Malawi and Peru. It deferred consideration of the national institutions of Afghanistan, France, Honduras, Nigeria, the Philippines, Portugal, Poland and Sweden to October 2007, when a further review of those of Nepal, Nigeria and Sri Lanka would also take place. It confirmed B-status for the national institutions of Burkina Faso and Jordan, and C-status for those of Puerto Rico and Romania. It decided to review the status of the national institution of Nepal because no commissioners had been appointed, and to suspend the accreditation of that of Fiji owing to concerns for its independence in the wake of the military coup of December 2006.

12. To date, the Committee has accredited 59 national human rights institutions deemed by it to be in compliance with the Paris Principles. The National Institutions Unit of OHCHR, as secretariat of the Committee, continues to work to strengthen the Committee's accreditation procedure and to make it more transparent.

13. The Committee bureau met for the first time, from 19 to 22 June 2007, in Geneva. The meeting was attended by the Committee Chair (Canada), the

Committee Vice-Chair (Republic of Korea), the immediately previous Committee Chair (Denmark) and one national institution per region, respectively from India, Nigeria, Mexico and Ireland. The bureau members met with a number of interlocutors, including the outgoing and incoming presidents of the Human Rights Council, the chairpersons of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, special procedures mandate holders, the High Commissioner and Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and other senior United Nations officials. The bureau had a comprehensive agenda and discussed, inter alia, the interaction of national institutions with the Human Rights Council and the treaty bodies, the interaction of national institutions with special procedures mandate holders; the proposal to establish a representation of the Committee in Geneva; country and early warning mechanisms for national institutions under threat; and organizational issues concerning the Committee.

14. In particular, the bureau members participated in and interacted with the inter-committee meeting of treaty body members, as well as with the fourteenth annual meeting of special procedures mandate holders. The interaction of the bureau with the inter-committee meeting of treaty bodies was much appreciated by the independent human rights experts. The treaty body members agreed on the importance of a harmonized approach of national institutions to the treaty body system and on the need to review the working methods and practical engagement of national institutions, with a view to ensuring more frequent interaction before the session and more effective follow-up to the concluding observations. The bureau also agreed with the treaty body members that greater involvement of national institutions in information-sharing before and participation in sessions of the treaty bodies, and follow-up action to their recommendations should be ensured. The interaction with special procedures mandate holders was welcomed by the mandate holders. The bureau and the special procedures mandate holders agreed to meet formally and regularly with a view to enhancing all aspects of their cooperation, especially in the preparation of visits and at the country level. The bureau welcomed the fact that the special procedures mandate holders would discuss and consider favourably the proposals for their interaction with national institutions contained in the background document circulated at the session. National institutions are instrumental in the work of special procedures, mandate holders, specifically with regard to (a) country visits (preparation of a country visit; meetings during a country visit; follow-up to recommendations after a country visit); (b) letters of allegation or early warning; (c) thematic studies, conferences and seminars; and (d) interaction with special procedures at international forums, such as the Human Rights Council or the annual meeting of special procedures mandate holders.

15. Further to the holding of the eighth International Conference of National Human Rights Institutions (Bolivia, October 2006) and as requested by the Declaration of Santa Cruz, a study on best practices of national institutions addressing human rights and migration issues is being prepared for presentation to all national institutions in 2007.

2. United Nations bodies

Human Rights Council

16. OHCHR has been supporting an enhanced role for national human rights institutions in the work of the Human Rights Council, in compliance with resolution 2005/74 of the Commission on Human Rights and past practice by the Commission. In the resolution which it adopted at the end of the institution-building phase on 18 June 2007, the Council created many opportunities for national institutions and their regional coordinating mechanisms to participate in Council sessions and engage with its various mechanisms. The national institutions accredited by the International Coordination Committee as being in compliance with the Paris Principles, the Committee itself and regional coordinating bodies of national institutions may participate and address the Council in an independent capacity and on all agenda items. They may also submit written statements, issue documentation with their own United Nations document symbol and have separate seating arrangements. With regard to the Council mechanisms, national institutions have been given a clear and significant role, for example with regard to the universal periodic review mechanism, where one of the three types of documents for review will consist of information provided by non-governmental organizations and national institutions. The latter are thus likely to play a crucial role in all phases of the universal periodic review, from the submission of documentation to the follow-up. National institutions will also play an important role regarding the Council Advisory Body, as well as, more specifically, the complaints procedure.

17. Once in place, the proposed International Coordinating Committee representation in Geneva is likely to contribute to ensuring greater participation of national institutions in the regular and special sessions of the Human Rights Council, in its various mechanisms and in the treaty body system.

C. Support for regional initiatives

1. The Americas and the Caribbean

Workshops and training

18. As follow-up to the initial missions conducted in 2005, OHCHR provided assistance and advice on the establishment of national institutions in Chile and Uruguay. In the case of Chile, OHCHR provided advice to the Government concerning the compliance of the Instituto de Derechos Humanos with the Paris Principles. In the case of Uruguay, OHCHR and UNDP Uruguay assisted a working group set up to prepare a draft law for the establishment of a national human rights institution.

19. The preparations for the implementation of the Actors for Change project on the prevention of torture for Spanish-speaking national institutions have been finalized with the translation of a CD-ROM into Spanish and the setting of a date and location for a regional seminar. The distance learning course is expected to run from September to October 2007. The regional seminar is scheduled to be held in Costa Rica in the last week of November 2007.

2. Africa

(a) Network of African National Human Rights Institutions

20. Since 2006, OHCHR has supported the setting-up of a permanent secretariat for the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions in Nairobi. With the financial support of OHCHR, an executive director was recently recruited, as was an assistant. OHCHR has encouraged other potential donors to support the secretariat once a plan of action and programme of activities are defined.

21. OHCHR also worked with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to establish a network of national human rights institutions of West African States, which was achieved on 10 November 2006. The network will serve as a platform to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to protect and promote human rights in West Africa. The West African network is composed of all the West African national institutions, irrespective of their compliance with the Paris Principles.

(b) Workshops and training

22. In collaboration with the United Nations System Staff College and the non-governmental organization Fahamu, a distance training programme on conflict prevention was organized for national institutions of anglophone countries of Africa and the Middle East. The final workshop of the programme was held in Nairobi, from 15 to 20 July 2007. The objective of the workshop was to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to engage in conflict prevention by reinforcing their regional networks. It was generally recognized that, collaboration with national institutions enables the rule of law to be strengthened and the capacity to prevent conflict to be enhanced. This training programme was incentive-based, with initial training via distance learning with CD-ROMs and expert facilitators. Those who completed the initial training successfully came together in Nairobi for a regional training session, where they participated in practical exercises based on what they had learned. Upon successful completion of the programme, participants received a certificate from the University of Oxford.

23. A similar course was organized for francophone national institutions on torture prevention. The final workshop was held in Rabat from 29 May to 2 June 2007, in cooperation with the non-governmental organizations Association for the Prevention of Torture and Fahamu.

24. The sixth Conference of African national human rights institutions will be held from 8 to 10 October 2007, in Kigali, on the role of national institutions in protecting refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. The overall objective of the Conference is to strengthen the capacity of African national institutions to engage effectively for the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, thereby helping to reinforce national human rights protection systems. OHCHR, in cooperation with UNDP and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Rwanda, is providing financial, organizational and substantive support for this event.

3. Asia and the Pacific

Workshops and training

25. OHCHR has launched consultations concerning the holding of a regional workshop in Asia on the establishment of national human rights institutions in Asia. In cooperation with the country hosting the workshop, OHCHR would invite Governments and parliamentarians from 12 countries in Asia that do not yet have national institutions for the purpose of providing them with practical tools and lessons learned in order to establish national institutions in their countries. Representatives of United Nations country teams from the concerned countries, representatives of the secretariat of the Asia-Pacific Forum and experts from within existing reputable national institutions in Asia will also be invited to attend by national human rights institutions. In this connection, it should also be noted that, at the fourteenth annual workshop of the Framework on Regional Cooperation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region, held in Bali from 10 to 12 July 2007, the Bali Action Points were adopted. In the preamble to that document, Member States noted the proposal of OHCHR to hold, in 2007, a regional workshop on the establishment of national institutions with a view to sharing information and best practices.

26. From 24 to 27 September 2007, the Asia-Pacific Forum, together with the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, will be holding its twelfth annual meeting, in Sydney, Australia. The main goal of the meeting is to enhance human rights cooperation in the Asia and Pacific Region through the promotion and strengthening of national human rights institutions. OHCHR will support and actively participate in this event.

4. Europe

(a) European Group of National Human Rights Institutions

27. OHCHR participated in the meetings of the Coordinating Committee of the European Group of national human rights institutions, in Geneva, on 20 March 2007, and Berlin, on 14 June 2007, in order to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as the reform of accreditation procedures for national institutions; the participation of national institutions in the work of the Human Rights Council; regional cooperation concerning national institutions, and the project on joint operations for independent national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights.

(b) Workshops and training

28. In February 2007, at the request of an Italian Member of Parliament, OHCHR provided legal advice on the law on the establishment of a national human rights institution in Italy. Further advice was provided, at the request of the Comitato per la promozione e la protezione dei diritti umani, on the draft law that was then approved in April 2007 by the Chamber of Deputies. OHCHR will follow closely the action by the Senate with respect to this draft law.

29. OHCHR participated in the regional ombudsman conference organized by the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo with the support of the United States Office in Prishtinë/Priština and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on 8 and 9 June 2007, in Prishtinë/Priština, Kosovo. The theme of the

conference was "Support and obstacles to the protection of human rights; cooperation between ombudsman institutions and public administration, media and civil society". The conference brought together ombudsman institutions from across South-Eastern Europe, representatives of Kosovo local authorities, civil society groups and the media, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations. It was considered a success and led to specific and practical joint recommendations.

30. OHCHR participated in the Supplementary Human Dimension meeting entitled "Protection and promotion of human rights: responsibilities and effective remedies", organized by OSCE and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on 12 and 13 July 2007. One of the three main sessions was devoted to the role of independent national institutions in promoting and protecting human rights. OHCHR actively participated in the meeting and held bilateral discussions on its future cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

5. Arab region

31. In 2007, OHCHR participated in the meetings of the Arab-European Human Rights Dialogue which were organized by the Jordan National Centre for Human Rights and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, with the aim of establishing a regional platform for cooperation and exchange on human rights issues between Arab and European national human rights institutions.

32. The first preparatory meeting of the Dialogue, held in Amman from 27 February to 1 March 2007, focused on access to information and civil society development, while the high-level meeting, held in Amman on 18 and 19 April 2007, focused on human rights and terrorism. The Dialogue meetings are an important form of cross-border cooperation promoted by national institutions, in order to find a common strategy in the implementation of international norms, for example, freedom of association, fair trial and the principle of non-discrimination. Concerning the protection of human rights while countering terrorism, it was recommended that a joint Arab-European working group develop practical tools for national institutions with regard to human rights. The active participation of OHCHR in the preparatory meeting allowed for discussions and closer cooperation with a number of national institutions from the Arab region.

33. A three-day regional conference on the role of national institutions promoting the independence of the judiciary in the Arab region is scheduled to be held from 5 to 7 November 2007. The aim of the event, which will be organized by OHCHR in cooperation with the national human rights institution of Morocco, the Conseil consultatif des droits de l'homme, is to support national and regional initiatives devised to strengthen the role of national institutions in promoting the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary in accordance with international norms.

III. Cooperation between human rights treaty bodies, special procedures of the Human Rights Council and national human rights institutions

34. OHCHR is continuing to engage with treaty body members and special procedures mandate holders by providing expert analyses concerning national

human rights institutions and their activities. OHCHR regularly prepares briefs for each treaty body on the national institution and related issues in the countries under examination, as well as for special procedures mandate holders for their country visits. OHCHR also prepares and regularly updates a compilation of all treaty body concluding observations and recommendations relating to national institutions (posted on the website www.nhri.net), and sends concluding observations, following their adoption, to the national institutions of the countries concerned.

A. Treaty bodies

35. OHCHR has been involved in a project on strengthening the implementation of human rights treaty recommendations through the enhancement of national protection mechanisms. This project is aimed at improving the implementation of conclusions and recommendations of human rights treaty bodies at the national level through strengthening the capacity of three main target groups: national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and the media. The project activities are designed to enhance the participation of the three main target groups in the reporting process, as well as to encourage the use of the international instruments and treaty body recommendations in their respective areas of work as a tool to further the promotion and protection of human rights. In 2007, national institutions and other stakeholders in two countries benefited from this project: preparatory workshops were organized in both Guyana and Indonesia. In these workshops, the national institutions, non-governmental organizations and the media were able to build their capacity in the international human rights treaty body process.

36. On 20 June 2007, the Bureau of the International Coordinating Committee participated in the sixth inter-committee meeting of treaty bodies. At the meeting, the draft harmonized approach on national institutions and treaty bodies was discussed; the treaty bodies showed a positive response to national institutions participating in the treaty body process (see also paras. 8 and 14 above).

B. Special procedures

37. OHCHR organized a side event at the fourteenth annual meeting of special procedures mandate holders, focusing on interaction between national institutions and special procedures. The background document for the event, which contained concrete recommendations, met with overwhelming support from the special procedures mandate holders present, including the Chairperson of the Coordination Committee of the special procedures. It was subsequently submitted to the annual meeting as a document under the relevant agenda item (see also para. 14 above).

IV. Cooperation between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations agencies and programmes, and international and regional organizations

38. During the reporting period, OHCHR has strengthened and continued its cooperation with United Nations country teams worldwide. As part of its leadership role concerning national institutions in the context of action on the rule of law, on 2 April 2007, OHCHR addressed letters to all United Nations Resident Coordinators together with an information note for country teams on the practical steps that they could take, in cooperation with OHCHR, in order to establish or strengthen a national human rights institution. National institutions can provide significant support to the United Nations with respect to efforts on good governance, the rule of law and human rights, and are central to the effective implementation of programmes in these areas, especially with respect to their sustainability and national ownership. Several positive responses have been received from United Nations country teams from various regions of the world and a number of joint activities are being discussed as follow-up to this initiative.

39. OHCHR has also strengthened and continued its cooperation with the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie, the Association francophone des commissions nationales des droits de l'homme, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Council of Europe, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Ibero-American Federation of Ombudsmen, the Special Fund for Ombudsmen and National Human Rights Institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean, the African Union, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and ECOWAS in its work relating to national institutions.

40. Representatives of OHCHR participated in a conference and steering committee meeting of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London in February and May 2007 respectively, regarding the setting-up of a Commonwealth forum of national human rights institutions. The primary purpose of the forum would be to serve as a platform for strengthening the capacity of national human rights institutions to protect and promote human rights in the Commonwealth. It was agreed that one of the main objectives of the forum would be the promotion of increased access, dialogue and interaction of national human rights institutions with Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings. The forthcoming meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government will be held in Kampala in November 2007 and the forum is planning its first series of activities for that occasion.

V. National human rights institutions and thematic issues

A. Prevention of torture

41. Further to the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and the establishment of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (December 2002), OHCHR launched a survey on the role played by national human rights institutions in torture prevention. Representatives of the national institutions of Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Germany,

Greece, Guatemala, India, Ireland, Jordan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, the Niger, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Slovakia, Spain, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Uzbekistan participated in the first round of the survey. The first results of the survey were very much appreciated by the Subcommittee and other actors.

42. In March 2007, a thematic dialogue was organized by OHCHR on the role of national human rights institutions and torture prevention, in order to explore opportunities for those institutions to operate as a national preventive mechanism under the Optional Protocol.

B. Transitional justice

43. In November 2007, OHCHR will organize a round table on national human rights institutions and transitional justice in order to discuss and share the experiences and best practices of those institutions in dealing with transitional justice and reconciliation. The aim of the round table will be to provide national institutions with guidelines and practical tools to elaborate effective strategies that include effective measures to fight impunity, strengthen accountability and ensure respect for the rule of law. It will build on the relevant experience of national institutions in all countries.

VI. Conclusions

44. **National human rights institutions are a key element of strong and effective national human rights protection systems. When in compliance with the Paris Principles, they can be important partners in the international human rights system, especially the Human Rights Council, the United Nations human rights treaty bodies and the special procedures mandate holders. In particular, they can ensure the application of international norms at the national level also by facilitating follow-up action to the recommendations emanating from the human rights system.**

45. **The Secretary-General welcomes the increasingly important role of national human rights institutions in the work of OHCHR and the deepening of their partnership in connection with the implementation of the OHCHR Plan of Action and country engagement strategies. The more OHCHR field offices and the United Nations system work closely with and through independent national institutions, the greater the chances of success. Working with national institutions provides a platform for national ownership, and thus the sustainability, of United Nations human rights programmes.**

46. **With the support of OHCHR, national human rights institutions are also engaging more actively in the Human Rights Council and with the United Nations human rights treaty bodies and special procedures mandate holders. In 2007, OHCHR has responded to the increasing demand from Member States and stakeholders for in-depth expertise regarding national institutions.**

47. **The Secretary-General thus encourages OHCHR to continue to work on the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions and enhance its relationship with them. National consultations and**

awareness-raising activities involving all major stakeholders, such as Government officials, members of Parliament, civil society and the media, are indispensable in this process. United Nations country teams should become major partners at the country level in these endeavours and should increasingly develop partnerships with national institutions, especially those compliant with the Paris Principles, in connection with programmes and activities in the areas of the rule of law, good governance and human rights.

48. OHCHR is working towards enhancing its support for and relationship with the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, its newly established bureau, as well as its accreditation procedure so that national institutions can more effectively contribute to ensuring that international human rights norms are translated into consistent national laws and practices. OHCHR, as the secretariat of the Committee, must continue to uphold the Paris Principles and support the review of the compliance of national institutions with them. The importance of this process is shown by the increase in applications for accreditation, the rise in the number of A-status national institutions and in the access recognized to such institutions by the Human Rights Council and the United Nations human rights treaty bodies.